

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch

Nitzavim-Vayeilech 20 “The (Last) Day”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat Shalom.

First, I'd like to wish a mazal tov to Sharon Drowos and Evan Frank on their wedding this week.

And congratulations to Mekor couple #12, Yael Leiner and David Parvey, upon the birth of a baby girl, named Elisheva Devorah. Mazal tov!

Announcements.

Rosh Hashana is coming up in one week, and it's amazing how quickly the summer has passed. The Sages tell us that whenever the Torah refers to Hayom, the Day, it's alluding to Rosh Hashana. The holiday itself is already unique, but this year it will certainly be like no other Rosh Hashana in our history and will more than live up to the name Hayom.

Rosh Hashana commemorates the 6th and final day of God's active Creation, a momentous date in the history of the world. That may be why Parshat Nitzavim is always read prior to Rosh Hashana. It begins with the verse, *You are standing today*, and then repeats the words *HaYom* numerous times. The word *standing* is commonly used in reference to legal judgment because when someone enters a courtroom, he is required to stand before the court. So Nitzavim is an apt reference to the life-changing judgment we face on Rosh Hashana.

However, in this Parsha, *HaYom* also refers to the last day of Moshe's life. We might wonder, why would the same words be applied to Rosh Hashana, the beginning of the new year, but also to the ending of Moshe's life? After all, it makes sense to assume that that Rosh Hashana, a new year, should evoke in us an entirely different reaction from the response we have to the finality of death.

But that supposition is actually based on a common misconception about Rosh Hashana. Due to Covid this year, we plan to shorten our services, so we will omit the piyyutim, the songs we typically include. I'm happy about this, primarily because I have always wanted to remove Unetana Tokef, because it gives a misleading impression of the holiday. For example, it states that our fates are *written on Rosh Hashana and sealed on Yom Kippur*. That is arguably accurate about some elements of the holiday, but with respect to the judgment that we receive, according to the Rambam, most of what we're concerned about for the year ahead is sealed on Rosh Hashana. So the holiday marks the beginning of the new year, but it also marks an ending, just like Moshe's death. Rosh Hashana is our last chance to choose our ideal potential for the year to come. If we pass up that opportunity on Rosh Hashana, we won't get a do-over on Yom Kippur.

I think the Parsha is reminding us that Hayom, the day of Rosh Hashana will be both an ending and a beginning, and we should treat the holiday with the attention it warrants, independently of Yom Kippur.

Over the coming week, our goal should be to consider what kind of human being we'd each like to be and what we wish to accomplish. If we are mindful to prepare for Rosh Hashana with serious reflection, Hayom, this day, can have a transformational impact on our lives in the year ahead. Shabbat shalom.